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Campus Commentary

VOLUME 2

MARCH, 1952

No. 2

Dear Brother:

When these few notes reach you, spring will have come again to our land. It is a good time to lift our eyes from desks and pulpits and sick beds to the hills, the warm winds, and the flowers of the field. Some of the best preachers I have known during the past 25 years have been remarkably close to nature. I remember that my grandfather in Perry County could see the daffodil in the corner of the cemetery long before anyone else in the parish. It is still true that God speaks in and through nature. What He says, of course, is likely to be understood only by a believing heart. A preacher, who must always live close to the pulse of life if he is to be any good at all, will certainly keep a discerning and sympathetic ear and eye for the marching of the seasons and the ceaseless turning of the earth under the sun.

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Something different: I have been corresponding lately with a good brother about the problem of unionism. It is a pleasure to hear from him since he writes clearly, does not agree with me, and maintains throughout a warm, brotherly spirit. Apparently the difference between us lies in definitions. We have agreed that unionism is always a corrosive and deadly thing. It is a clear and unmistakable reflection of indifference to the Word of God. We have also agreed that any term not found in Scripture (especially all abstract nouns) must be most carefully defined lest consciences be led astray. Furthermore, when we are confronted with the critic and the criticized, we must remember that two consciences are involved and that both deserve a hearing. If they differ, one must be wrong and the difference must be submitted to the Word of God and not to any vague, emotional notion that "in our circles" (a bad phrase) a certain thing has not been done for several years. All of us agree that there is nothing more shallow and contemptible and wrong than the doctrinal indifferentism which marks much of American Protestant life. We need not argue about that for one moment. What we must guard against is our tendency to judge a brother quickly and harshly before all the facts are clear and before we have heard the voice of *his* conscience.

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To the campus for a moment. In the course of academic routine it is necessary to have many meetings of committees and smaller groups in order to conduct the work of an institution of higher learning. Many of these meetings on our campus are informal and the discussion wanders far and wide. Last night, for example, I met with a group of our younger faculty people in order to discuss the relationship of the doctrine of man to education in a Lutheran institution such as ours. One of our young biologists discussed the approach of modern psychology to man and the Biblical doctrine of man. His presentation was most interesting. It is evident that certain sections of recent psychology begin to sound like vague echoes of the Scriptural doctrine of man. Psychologists are beginning to realize that man is more a man than an animal. The exclusively biological and materialistic approach has proved ethically and socially tragic and scientifically wrong. We shall not need modern psychology to establish a sound doctrine of man for educational purposes, but another clump of underbrush is being cleared away in these years by our advancing knowledge of life and man.

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A social note. During the past month we have had the pleasure of having students from almost all our Concordias on our campus as our guests. In addition to the students, a number of presidents and deans honored us with their presence. The meeting was devoted to a discussion of student government and the general topic was: "God—Freedom—Responsibility." Under these three heads we attempted to set up a sound, Lutheran approach to some form of self-government on our campuses. I found that the students were intelligent, alert, and thoroughly religious. Perhaps we who are older should confess (at least to ourselves) that our Concordias are much better than they were 25 years ago. I have often noticed that and have wondered why. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that 25 and 30 years ago the

boys at all our Concordias were American and the faculties were European. As a result there could be no understanding and sympathetic approach, at least in most cases. One of the curious things about the situation is and was that most of us turned out better than might have been expected—a special grace of God the Holy Spirit.

Amusing footnote: Some of our friends from the Concordias were surprised (and said so) that our Valpo students were such good Lutherans, that they emphasized spiritual values in education, and that they agreed fully with their guests on the basic facts of education and student government. When I saw repeated evidences of the wonder of our guests over the situation, I began to feel that the old notion that orthodoxy and Synodical control are synonymous is still with us. That brother, is a bad business — for if orthodoxy depends only on outward controls and not on a deep, inner loyalty to the Word and the Confessions, we are already sunk.

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Another little plea at this point. We are still in need of more names of prospective students. The response to our appeals is still so limited that I have been wondering if we have been using the right approach. Would it perhaps be easier for one of your young people to send us the lists of confirmation classes of three and four years ago? There would be some useless names on such lists but, by and large, they would be sufficiently accurate for our purposes, at least in most sections of the country. At any rate, brother, we really need those names, and you can do us a great favor at this particular moment by sending them to us. By the way, I should say I was tremendously pleased a few weeks ago when a good brother from an urban parish informed me that he now had 13 graduates of the University in his church and that all of them are exceedingly active members of the church. We cannot, of course, promise that kind of performance in every case. No school can. Year by year, however, I believe that we can say that we do very well. I have thought about it again during these past few weeks when I have noted the attendance at our Lenten services. It is astonishing to see that, week after week, almost every one in our University family attends the services either at Immanuel church or the University auditorium.

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A thoughtful brother sends me a copy of Herbert Butterfield's "Christianity and History," a remarkable little volume published by G. Bell of London. Mr. Butterfield is Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge in England and one of the leading historians of our time. His entire presentation is stimulating and thoughtful. I was especially interested in his chapter on the doctrine of man in the interpretation of history. He points out that one of the great weaknesses of modern thought has been an unrealistic view of man. His position can be summarized in this sentence, "It may prevent a misunderstanding if I say that even after all possible allowances have been made I accept Acton's thesis in regard to the generality of human wickedness." After examining this thesis in detail, Mr. Butterfield writes two paragraphs which I believe will be of interest to you. Please remember that they are written by a historian and not a theologian.

"Against this curious toughness which seems to exist in the very texture of historical events, and against this admixture of earthiness which subjects the whole story to the serious gravitational pull, the more superficial kinds of idealism beat themselves into foam, and hang in the air as a sort of alien froth. It is easy to make plans of quasi-political salvation for the world if we can have human nature as we want it to be, and presume on a general change of heart in our fellow men. And when such plans go wrong, it is easy to find a culprit — easy for the idealist to bring from under his sleeve that doctrine of human sinfulness which it would have been so much better for him to have faced fairly and squarely in the first instance. At a later stage in the argument the disillusioned idealist trounces the people who thwarted him, and brings human wickedness into the question, as a *deus ex machina*, when it ought to have entered more profoundly into the initial stages of the problem. And now he discovers wickedness with a vengeance — for in this system the sinners are fewer in number but they are diabolically wicked in order to make up for it. Nothing more completely locks the human race in some of its bewildering dilemmas and predicaments than to range history into a fight of white men, pure and righteous, against the diabolically wicked, instead of seeing initially that human nature — including oneself — is imperfect generally. In reality events tie themselves into knots because of the general cupidity; situations becoming more frantic and deadlocks more hopeless because of man's universal presumption and self-righteousness; and some men may even be goaded to greater wickedness by the exasperating conduct of the stiffnecked.

"Therefore, though history does not carry these questions to the searching depths at which the theologian may make his judgments and expose the fallacy of our pretended righteousnesses, it seems to me that even at his own level, even in the realm of observable historical happenings, the historian must join hands with the theologian; and the truth of the fact becomes patent when conflicts are bitter and times are desperate. In the kind of world

that I see in history there is one sin that locks people up in all their other sins, and fastens men and nations more tightly than ever in their predicaments — and that is the one which is not allowed by the terms of the situation which I have defined, namely the sin of self-righteousness."

What a vast difference there is between these sentences and the vague, sentimental, idealistic pap which passed for a philosophy of history during the greater part of the nineteenth century.

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As this is written, we have no definite report concerning the results of the Conquest for Christ Offering. Personally I have no doubt at all that we shall go far over the top. There has been a universal enthusiasm and a deep loyalty to the work of the Kingdom which is being manifested in every phase of this great program. Having said that, may I also add a small, humble plea for our own work here at the University? If it has been necessary for you to set us aside because of the great Conquest for Christ Offering, we really hope that it may be possible for your congregation to do something for the University during the next few months. This is, of course, true also of other endeavors in the Church, but I am sure that you are hearing from the stricken brethren directly.

* * *

The willing and loyal "slaves" who see these notes through the presses, then stuff them into envelopes so that they finally land on your desk inform me that they will be able to send this to you before the Festival of Easter. That is the only reason for this final paragraph. Easter, I am sure you will agree, has probably been sentimentalized and socialized even more than Christmas. Mrs. Van Lund Bushwa will be wearing a more stunning hat on Easter morning than Mrs. D. Bologna. That great fact will be chronicled in many newspapers, and the real significance of the Festival of the Resurrection will be forgotten. May I therefore assure you of my prayers that you will be able to break through all the curious and shallow notions which surround Easter to the most tremendous fact in history—the fact of the Resurrection of our Lord on Easter morning. While I was thinking about this, I again saw the famous statement of Beverly Nichols in which he says that one of our great modern errors, especially within certain sections of the Christian Church, is to feel that we may water down the Christian faith. Mr. Nichols points out that the human mind and heart may reject or deny the faith, but it does not have the right to make it something different. He says that this is particularly true of the story of Easter. It means, he writes, "... when we talk about the Resurrection, we must not imply merely a 'spiritual resurrection', nor a mere survival of the dead man's idea, nor a pious legend derived from a hodge-podge of Greek manuscripts. We must imply that on a certain hour between night and day, in an Eastern tomb, there was a strange stirring, while immense and incalculable forces poured back life into the body of a dead man so that he was able to rise up and walk out into the moonlight. We must imply this and nothing less. We must believe the thing happened; it must be so real to us we must hear, in our hearts, the faint sigh in the tomb as life flooded back into the corpse and body, must be able to smell, in our own nostrils, the medley of strange scents which floated back to him, the scent of spices, and dust, and stale blood. Can we persuade ourselves, beyond any shadow of doubt, that these things happened? That is the tremendous question we have to ask ourselves." It is certainly the greatest question with which we shall ever be faced in the earthly life. This will be your problem and privilege on Easter Sunday. The answer you will, by the grace of God, be able to say, was given in a garden at dawn on the third day after Good Friday.

Sincerely yours,

O. P. Kretzmann

President